

## Introduction

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## Introduction

### Purpose and Need

The Owyhee Resource Management Plan (RMP) was prepared to provide the Bureau of Land Management, Lower Snake River District with a comprehensive framework for managing public lands administered by the Owyhee Resource Area. The purpose of the RMP is to ensure public land use is planned for and managed on the basis of multiple-use and sustained yield in accordance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA).

### Planning Area

The Owyhee Resource Area, located in southwestern Idaho's Owyhee County, encompasses 1,779,492 acres. This total includes the following:

1,320,032	acres administered by BLM, Idaho
136,936	acres administered by the State of Idaho
319,777	acres of private lands
2,747	acres of water, primarily the Snake River

The area is bounded on the west by Oregon, on the south by Nevada, on the north by the Snake River and on the east by Castle Creek, Deep Creek, the Owyhee River, and the Duck Valley Indian Reservation. Most of the public lands are contiguous with only a few scattered or isolated parcels. See Map LAND-1.

The resource area contains the northern extent of the Owyhee Mountain Range and lies within what is often referred to as the Columbia Plateau. The Columbia Plateau is an elevated plateau with mountains which are separated by canyons draining to the Pacific Ocean via the Snake and Columbia Rivers. This broad regional landform and vegetative classification is known as the Intermountain Sagebrush Province/Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem.

The Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem is widespread over much of southern Idaho, eastern Oregon and Washington, and portions of northern Nevada, California, and Utah. This ecosystem contains a large diversity in landform and vegetation types ranging from vast expanses of flat sagebrush covered plateaus to rugged mountains blanketed with juniper woodlands and grasslands.

The former Boise District has changed its name to the Lower Snake River District. Owyhee Resource Area staff are within the Lower Snake River District which is located in the Boise Field Office in Boise, Idaho. Within this document there are several references to the Boise District. Where these Boise District references appear, they apply to the Lower Snake River District.

### Public Participation

Public participation in the planning process began with publication of a Federal Register Notice of Intent to initiate a resource management plan in October 1989, and distribution of a scoping notice in November 1989. This was the public's opportunity to suggest concerns, needs and management opportunities for the BLM to consider during the preparation of the RMP.

The scoping notice was sent to nearly 1,100 individuals, organizations and agencies including nearly 100 livestock permittees. The notice identified preliminary issues and general topics to be addressed in the RMP and solicited public comment on additional concerns. The notice also announced three public meetings that were held in Jordan Valley, Oregon, and in Marsing and Boise, Idaho in December of 1989.



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The three public meetings were attended by over 100 people. The BLM also received 164 scoping letters from individuals, organizations and agencies. This high level of interest and participation generated many comments expressing concern with management of the public lands and what issues should be addressed in the Owyhee RMP. Public participation also occurred during development of the Planning Criteria and during the Wild and Scenic River study process which is incorporated into this planning effort.

Two groups also participated during the planning process by developing alternatives for the RMP. The Owyhee County Commissioners assisted by the Owyhee County Natural Resources Committee submitted information from which one alternative was developed.

The Desert Group, with membership representing the environmental and conservation oriented community, submitted information for the development of another alternative.

Proposed planning criteria were developed by the interdisciplinary team and sent to the public for review and comment in November 1990. A total of sixteen comment letters were received in response. The public comments were considered and appropriate revisions were made. The planning criteria were approved by the District Manager in February 1991.

The draft RMP/EIS was released for public review and comment on August 16, 1996. The public comment period was extended twice, for a total of 10½ months, and closed on July 3, 1997. Over 2,500 copies of the draft document were printed and distributed to the public. During the comment period three public information meetings and four workshop sessions were held to assist the public in providing comments. The Martin Institute, University of Idaho was contracted to facilitate the workshops which were

The Proposed RMP and Final EIS was prepared following consideration of public comments on the draft document and in response to internal BLM direction. The Proposed Owyhee Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement was released for a 30-day protest period under provisions in the planning regulations found at 43 CFR 1610.5-2 on June 1, 1999. The 30-day protest period began on July 2, 1999 and closed on August 2, 1999. The document was distributed to 2,018 entities.

A total of 52 protest letters were received by the Director, BLM in Washington, D.C. Resolution of those protests by the Director did not result in any changes to the proposed plan that was published in the Proposed Plan/Final EIS document. The Owyhee Resource Management Plan was approved by the BLM Idaho State Director on December 30, 1999. The approved Owyhee Resource Management Plan is the same as the Proposed Plan that was presented in the Proposed Plan/Final EIS document. The Federal Register Notice of Availability of the Record of Decision was published on January 24, 2000.

The Owyhee Resource Management Plan is republished as a part of this document to display those decisions, management actions and allocations, along with applicable appendices, tables and maps, that are to be implemented over the life of the plan. Information that was presented in the Proposed Plan/Final EIS document that was informational or analytical has not been included in the Owyhee Resource Management Plan but will be taken into consideration, along with additional information that may become available, during plan implementation.



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### Planning Criteria

This step in the planning process provides for the development of planning criteria. Planning criteria influence all aspects of the planning process including inventory and data collection, formulation of alternatives, estimation of effects, and selection of the preferred alternative and RMP. Planning criteria can be in the form of limits or constraints, or they can be statements of goals or standards to be achieved.

Planning Criteria do the following:

- streamline the plan's preparation and put it into focus;
- establish standards, rules, and measures to be used in the process;
- guide development of the RMP to ensure that it is tailored to the issues;
- guide and direct the resolution of issues through the planning process;
- indicate factors and data that must be considered in making decisions.

The planning criteria were approved by the District Manager in February 1991.

### General Planning Criteria

The principles of multiple use and sustained yield will guide the land use decisions within the Owyhee Resource Area. However, all lands may not be open for all multiple uses. Some uses may be excluded on some lands to protect resource values either by law or regulation or by decision reached through the planning process. Site specific locations for range improvements and other structures will generally not be determined in the RMP. The RMP was prepared using the most current and best available information. Only limited inventories for the purpose of gathering additional data were conducted. The following general planning criteria apply to the Owyhee RMP.

- Existing laws, regulations, and BLM policies;
- Plans, programs and policies of other federal agencies, state and local governments, and Indian tribes;
- Public input;
- Quantity and quality of noncommodity resource values;
- Future needs and demands for existing or potential resource commodities and values;
- Past and present use of public and adjacent lands;
- Public benefits of providing goods and services relative to costs;
- Environmental impacts;
- Social and economic values;
- Public welfare and safety.

### Specific Program Planning Criteria

In addition to the general criteria listed above, the following program-specific criteria will apply to individual program decisions:

**Air Quality:** Under the Clean Air Act, BLM administered lands were given a Class II air quality classification. This classification allows moderate deterioration associated with moderate, well-controlled industrial and population growth. All lands within the resource area will be managed under Class II standards unless they are reclassified by the State as provided for in the Clean Air Act.

**Water Quality:** Section 319 of the Clean Water Act obligates federal agencies to be consistent with State Nonpoint Source Management Program Plans and relevant water quality standards. Section 313 requires compliance with State Water Quality Standards. BLM will incorporate applicable best management practices or other conservation measures for specific programs and activities into the RMP. Water quality will be maintained or improved in accordance with State and Federal standards.



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**Vegetation Management:** Vegetation will be managed to achieve desired plant communities (considering the ecological site potential) that provide for:

- Biodiversity; protection and restoration of native species; and non-consumptive uses including plant protection, visual quality and watershed protection.
- The desired plant communities will provide forage for livestock, wildlife, and wild horses.
- Forage will be allocated for domestic livestock grazing on suitable rangeland based on multiple use and sustained yield.
- Plant maintenance, watershed protection and stability, and wildlife habitat needs will be provided for.
- Forage will be allocated to support wildlife at population levels based on multiple use and sustained yield objectives and through consultation with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game.
- Forage will be allocated to wild horses sufficient to support the appropriate management level (AML).
- Water quality will be given priority in all vegetation management decisions.
- Prescribed fire and other treatment methods will be considered as management tools to manipulate vegetation.

**Riparian Areas, Floodplains and Wetlands:** Riparian areas, floodplains and wetlands will be managed to protect, improve and restore their natural functions to benefit water storage, groundwater recharge, water quality, and fish and wildlife values. All management practices will be designed to maintain or improve the integrity of these high-priority values. The Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management will be used to guide management actions.

**Forest and Woodland Management:** Except where closed by law or regulation, lands containing forest products such as firewood and Christmas trees will be available for harvest, subject to special restrictions to protect other resource values.

**Noxious Weed Control:** BLM will work with county governments to monitor the locations and spread of noxious weeds. BLM will control the occurrence and spread of noxious weeds on public lands where economically feasible and to the extent funds are available. Noxious weed control will be conducted in accordance with the integrated weed management guidelines and design features identified in the Northwest Area Noxious Weed Control Program EIS of 1985.

**Threatened and Endangered Species:** Management actions authorized, funded or implemented by BLM will be done so as not to jeopardize the continued existence of Federally listed threatened or endangered plant or animal species or result in the destruction or modification of critical habitat. State sensitive species and species proposed for Federal listing (candidate species) will be given the same consideration as listed species.

**Wild Horses:** Forage will be provided to support wild horses at levels established in accordance with the Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act. Adjustments of the appropriate management level (AML) range will be based on monitoring to ensure a thriving natural ecological balance within the herd management areas (HMAs).



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**Livestock Management:** Livestock utilization of public lands will be managed under the principles of multiple use and sustained yield. Livestock will be managed to improve public land resources, enhance productivity and stabilize the livestock industry dependent upon the public range over the long term. The Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management will be used to provide guidance.

Forage will be allocated for domestic livestock grazing on suitable rangeland based on multiple use and sustained yield objectives by allotment. Forage determinations made in the RMP will provide guidance for issuance of grazing decisions on individual allotments in accordance with applicable BLM regulations. Decisions will be made on season of use, class of livestock and stocking levels.

**Fire Management:** Wildfires will be aggressively suppressed in all areas except where specifically identified to allow natural fire processes to occur. Fire suppression will be done using the least amount of surface disturbance. In wilderness study areas and in areas containing significant cultural or paleontological values, surface-disturbing fire suppression equipment will only be used to protect human life or property. Public lands and resources affected by fire will be rehabilitated in accordance with the multiple use objectives identified for the affected area, subject to available funding. The Lower Snake River District Fire Management Plan will provide guidance for fire management activities.

**Land Tenure Adjustments:** All public lands will be retained in federal ownership unless determined that disposal of a particular parcel will serve the public interest. Lands may be identified for disposal by sale, exchange, or State indemnity selection. Lands identified for acquisition will be based on public benefits, management considerations and public access needs. Specific actions to implement the land tenure decisions made in the RMP will include full public participation.

**Rights-of-Way:** Public lands will generally be available for transportation and utility rights-of-way except where specifically prohibited by law or regulation (such as wilderness study areas) and in areas specifically identified as avoidance and exclusion areas to protect high resource values.

**Energy and Minerals:** Except where specifically withdrawn to protect resource values, public lands will be available for energy and mineral exploration and development based upon applicable regulations and Federal and State laws. Mitigation measures will be developed to protect resource values.

**Recreation:** The public lands will be managed to enhance recreation opportunities and visual resources. All lands will be identified as being within either special recreation management areas (SRMAs) or extensive recreation management areas (ERMAs). Some areas may be subject to special measures to protect resources or reduce conflicts among uses. BLM may develop and maintain various recreation facilities on the public lands including campgrounds, picnic areas and boat launches.

**Motorized Vehicle Use:** All public lands will be designated as open, limited, or closed to off-highway vehicles. Public safety, resource protection, user access needs and conflict resolution will be considered in making these decisions.

**National Wild and Scenic Rivers System:** All rivers and streams in the Owyhee Resource Area, including those on the Nationwide River Inventory, will be evaluated for potential addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The evaluation will be done in accordance with the guidelines published by the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture on September 7, 1982, and other current applicable guidance.



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**Wilderness Recommendations:** BLM wilderness recommendations developed during previous wilderness evaluation efforts will be carried forward into the RMP. Any additional BLM wilderness “suitable” recommendations developed during the RMP will be in accordance with the criteria and quality standards identified in the BLM Wilderness Study Policy; Policies Criteria and Guidelines for Conducting Wilderness Studies on Public Lands.

**Cultural, Geological, Paleontological and Cave Resources:** Cultural, geological, paleontological and cave resources will be managed to maintain or enhance significant scientific, educational and recreational values. Cultural sites that meet National Register criteria will be protected and nominated for inclusion on the register.

**Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC):** Areas of critical environmental concern (ACECs) are defined by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) as: “Areas within the public lands where special management attention is required to protect and prevent irreparable damage to important historic, cultural, or scenic values, fish and wildlife resources or other natural systems or processes, or to protect life and safety from natural hazards.” ACECs may be designated in areas where both criteria of “relevance” and “importance” as defined in the BLM planning regulations are met.

### Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project

Development of the Owyhee RMP has overlapped with the development of the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (ICBEMP). When the record of decision for the ICBEMP is signed, 65 BLM and Forest Service land use plans will be amended. The Owyhee RMP will be one of those plans. The amendment process will entail the incorporation of management direction from ICBEMP into the RMP in a hierarchical manner. If there is management direction in the RMP that is inconsistent with ICBEMP, the RMP will be revised to ensure consistency. If there is management direction from ICBEMP that is not addressed in the RMP, but that is applicable to the Owyhee Resource Area, it will be incorporated in the RMP. If there is management direction in the RMP that is consistent with ICBEMP, but is more detailed, it will be retained (this is expected to be the primary situation with the Owyhee RMP).

Also associated with the ICBEMP is the ICBEMP Scientific Assessment. The Scientific Assessment used information from many sources and disciplines on lands within the Basin and has resulted in the preparation of numerous documents, databases and models. The Scientific Assessment provides information about broad-scale conditions and trends within the Basin and is intended to be used by managers to develop broad management goals and priorities and to provide context for decisions at finer scales. The ICBEMP is developing processes for “stepping down” the broad-scale information of the Scientific Assessment which would involve three levels of analysis. These processes include sub-basin review (mid-scale analysis), ecosystem analysis at the watershed scale and site or project analysis. Over time, the Scientific Assessment information such as concerns with rangeland health, aquatic health, weeds, resource dependent economically vulnerable communities, etc. can be related to successively finer scales within the Owyhee Resource Area through the “step-down” process. Because the Owyhee RMP and the Scientific Assessment were developed concurrently, the Assessment has not been incorporated directly into the RMP. However, as with other plans in the Interior Columbia Basin, such incorporation will take place over time through the step-down process.



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### Relationship of the Owyhee RMP to Other Planning Documents

BLM has three primary levels of land use planning decisions; the RMP level, the activity level and the site specific level. This RMP focuses mostly on broad resource objectives and direction. However, it also provides some activity level guidance and includes some site specific decisions. Several existing activity level plans are referenced in this RMP. They will be updated or modified, as necessary, to include current information and be in conformance with the RMP. These plans include, but are not limited to, the Owyhee Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan, the Wild Horse Herd Management Plan, the Lower Snake River District Fire Management Plan, the Owyhee Juniper Woodland Harvest Management Plan, the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area Management Plan, the Owyhee River Recreation Management Plan and several livestock grazing allotment management plans. Subsequent activity level and site specific level planning processes will include appropriate public participation opportunities and NEPA compliance.

### Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area Legislation

Public Law 103-64 was passed by Congress and signed into law on August 4, 1993. This law established the 482,457 acre Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area (SRBOPNCA); 57,109 public land acres are within the Owyhee Resource Area. Section 3.(a)(2) states “The purposes for which the conservation area is established, and shall be managed, are to provide for the conservation, protection, and enhancement of raptor populations and habitats and the natural and environmental resources and values associated therewith, and of the scientific, cultural, and educational resources and values of the public lands in the conservation area.” These purposes have been incorporated into the management objectives for this area.

The law set forth specific land use management directives for the conservation area. The law specifically withdrew the Federal lands within the conservation area from all forms of entry, appropriation, application, selection and disposal except for voluntary land exchanges which would resolve ownership related land use conflicts within the conservation area. The law also withdrew the Federal lands from location under the mining laws, the operation of the mineral and geothermal leasing laws, and the mineral material disposal laws, except that mineral materials subject to disposal may be made available from existing sites. These mandates are reflected in the Owyhee RMP.

### Standards and Guidelines – Department of the Interior Regulations

The Secretary of Interior promulgated amendments (final rules) to the following regulations pertaining to livestock grazing on public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management: 43 CFR Part 4 - Department Hearings and Appeals Procedures; 43 CFR Part 1780 - Cooperative Relations; and 43 CFR Part 4100 - Grazing Administration-Exclusive of Alaska.

The above final rules were published in the Federal Register on February 22, 1995 and became effective on August 21, 1995.

Sections 4180.1 and 4180.2 of 43 CFR Part 4100 address “Fundamentals of rangeland health” and “Standards and guidelines for grazing administration”, respectively.

The Idaho State Director of the Bureau of Land Management, in consultation with the three resource advisory councils in Idaho established under 43 CFR Part 1780, Subpart 1784, developed standards and guidelines to be applied to livestock grazing. Those standards and guidelines were approved by the Secretary of Interior on August 12, 1997. See Appendix LVST-1.

The Owyhee Resource Management Plan incorporates the Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management.





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### Plan Evaluation

The RMP will be routinely monitored and periodically evaluated to determine if plan objectives are being met, or are likely to be met, and whether the objectives continue to be valid, realistic and achievable. Evaluation will also assess whether changed circumstances or new information would substantially alter the levels or methods of activities in the plan, or result in impacts that would be substantially different than those that were projected. The reason for the evaluation is to determine whether there is significant cause for an amendment or revision of the plan, or whether plan maintenance is appropriate.

This adaptive management approach is a continuing process of monitoring, researching, evaluating and adjusting management with the purpose of improving plan implementation and achieving RMP objectives. This approach should optimize the benefits and efficiency of the RMP. It will allow adjustments to be made to meet plan objectives, increase success and improve results. The RMP is based on current scientific knowledge and to be successful, it must have flexibility to adapt and respond to new information as the knowledge base changes. New information will be evaluated and a decision will be made whether to pursue adjustments or changes. New information that would compel a strategy adjustment may come from monitoring, research, statutory or regulatory changes, organizational or process adjustments or additional sources. This adjustment may result in the refinement of management direction or land use allocations as a plan maintenance action, or it may require a plan amendment. Adaptive management decisions may vary in scale from site-specific, to watershed level, to the entire resource area.

Minor changes, refinements or clarifications in the plan may take the form of plan maintenance actions. Maintenance actions respond to minor data changes and incorporation of activity plans. Such maintenance is limited to further refining or documenting a previously approved decision incorporated into the plan. Plan maintenance will not result in expansion of the scope of resource uses or restrictions, nor change the terms, conditions and decisions of the RMP. Maintenance actions are not considered a plan amendment and do not require the formal public involvement and interagency coordination process undertaken for plan amendments. Plan maintenance will be documented as appropriate. Plan maintenance is provided for in the BLM planning regulations in 43 CFR 1610.5-4.

If the evaluation concludes that land use allocations or management direction need to be modified or if plan objectives are not achievable, a plan amendment or revision may be appropriate. A plan amendment or revision may also be initiated because of the need to consider monitoring findings, new data, new or revised policy, a change in circumstances, or a proposed action that may result in the scope of resource uses, or a change in the terms, conditions and decisions of the RMP. If a plan amendment or revision is initiated, the procedures set forth in 43 CFR 1610.5-5 or 1610.5-6 will be followed.

